

Wellington, NZ

# HISTORY OF USN BASE HOSPITAL NO. FOUR

March 17, 1943 to December 31, 1943

The transformation of U.S.N. Mobile Hospital #6 into U.S.N. Base Hospital #4 was made without interruption in the daily routine; for with the personnel and physical facilities constant, the care and treatment of the patients continued in its usual manner. Captain Moring and Commander Stell, the commanding officer and executive officer of the newly formed U.S.N. Mobile Hospital #6, remained on the compound for several weeks completing the property transfer and arranging for its removal to Auckland. This was a laborious task for the men and involved the closing and emptying of the warehouse at Waterloo and the loading of the huge mass of building panels and other materials on to flat cars for movement to the new site of erection. The painstaking efforts of checking, sorting, and stacking experienced when our materials arrived had, therefore, through necessity to be repeated. Despite the overgrowth of the anticipated size of the hospital, a large surplus of stores was in existence and available to be turned over to the new hospital unit by virtue of the hurried issuance of new supplies and particularly due to the successful foraging throughout the countryside by the officers of the administrative, maintenance, and property departments.

{ Mobile Hospital #6  
Base Hospital #4

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Any misgivings as to the amount of work that the hospital would be required to perform were quickly dispelled as the following figures indicate. A comparative lull in the combatant aress, which has continued until recently, suggested that our medical activities might be curtailed, but actually we were never busier and it was fortunate that the original medical staff was augmented and the hospital facilities expanded. The First Marine Division had gradually departed from this country but were replaced by the Second Division and in vastly increasing numbers as replacements and units of special troops arrived. Facilities for the care of their own sick were exceedingly limited and it was some time before the division was able to establish three dispensaries. The brunt of the servicing of the sick troops fell to this hospital completely in the initial and final days of their stay in this area and for the major part of the interim. When the malarial experience of this division is made known, the extent of the task can be better appreciated. The usual and expected work continued as hospital trains and ships brought patients to us, from the islands and from other hospitals both for further treatment and for evacuation to the U.S.A. The daily load was also variable, depending on the shipping coming into Wellington, nearly all of which had accident or sick patients aboard, or men for whom they wished consultations. The data does not depict the very large amount of our patient work handled in this way, originating both in the marine and naval services.



From the opening of the hospital until March 17, 1943, the date of the establishment of USN Base Hospital #4, there were 4604 admissions. Since that time through December 31, 1943, there were 9641 admissions, totalling 14245.

By months the admissions were as follows:

|                     |               |      |
|---------------------|---------------|------|
| No. of patients - - | March 17 - 31 | 671  |
|                     | April         | 1385 |
|                     | May           | 1455 |
|                     | June          | 1114 |
|                     | July          | 1081 |
|                     | August        | 964  |
|                     | September     | 1531 |
|                     | October       | 827  |
|                     | November      | 118  |
|                     | December      | 485  |

The number of patients' sick days, exclusive of the staff, since our arrival at Silverstream is 288435, and including staff is 294809. These figures are given by months for both Mobile Hospital #6 and Base Hospital #4 for comparison, because of overlapping in the month of March.

|                  | Patients' Sick Days | Staff Sick Days |
|------------------|---------------------|-----------------|
| 138 Sept. - 1942 | 5806                | 157             |
| Oct.             | 7700                | 294             |
| Nov.             | 13945               | 324             |
| Dec.             | 19560               | 313             |
| Jan. - 1943      | 20636               | 415             |
| Feb.             | <u>23234</u>        | <u>397</u>      |
|                  | 90881               | 1900            |
| March            | 12004               | 304             |
| April            | 30487               | 567             |
| May              | 25482               | 470             |
| June             | 25059               | 503             |
| July             | 23656               | 574             |
| August           | 21914               | 775             |
| Sept.            | 28604               | 646             |
| Oct.             | 21041               | 441             |
| Nov.             | 14498               | 358             |
| December         | <u>14542</u>        | <u>396</u>      |
|                  | 226594              | 5228            |
|                  | Total - -           | 324605          |

A majority of the patients admitted to the hospital had complaints of a medical nature and although the surgical department had ample work in its own field, all medical officers had to turn to the treatment of the presenting problem which was malaria. Casualties were brought in from the combat zones but not in as great numbers as previously and there were the usual fracture and burn cases and those requiring the incidental surgery that would be expected in the large community the hospital was serving. Contagious cases did occur and it may be said with some degree of pride that there were no cross infections nor was there any epidemic of any kind. It is of interest to note that, as is the common current experience, the sporadic cases of meningococcus meningitis cleared miraculously within a

few days of instituting treatment with sulfathiazol or sulfadiazine. Pneumonia was uncommon as were the diseases usually attributed to the streptococcus although 14 cases of rheumatic fever have been observed. Of particular concern were the patients with cerebral symptoms of malaria and those with infectious hepatitis.

The hospital's experience with malaria was quite tremendous. The greater part of the infestations were due to the plasmodium vivax but up until June 1943 the plasmodium falciparum was observed not infrequently. Since that time, it has been found rarely. Recurrences of the clinical symptoms of malaria were very common with some of the men having as many as ten episodes. Only two cases of blackwater fever were seen and one of these was questionable. The malaria control unit opened a laboratory on the compound to serve this activity and the entire Second Marine Division. It was at first in charge of Lt. Comdr. Hunter, who was relieved by Lieut. McKinney, who in turn was relieved by Lt. Comdr. Hunter. A staff of especially trained corpsmen aided in the tremendous amount of work examining material and collecting statistics as the program of coordinating the study and treatment of malaria was extended. Comdr. Cracovaner, who was recently attached to the division, finally became the director in this area.

139 The necessity for making way for the influx of patients dictated the policy of treatment. The days of treatment were at first fourteen, but had to be limited to five, with the therapy being completed in the camps, later extended to twelve, and then two weeks. Various experiments and surveys were made within the division and as regards treatment analysis showed that two weeks of therapy with quinine or atabrine was as satisfactory as any and was the procedure used for the most part at this hospital.

There are two observations that are gratifying and the first is the health of the crew. There was an average of five hundred on the staff for most of the time. They spent 7128 days in the hospital or an average of about 14 days per man. However, there were no epidemics, no pneumonia, or frequent respiratory infections and no serious illnesses except in two instances, both in older men, one of which terminated in death, and prior to March 17, 1943, and the other was in a man returned to the U.S.A. with a carcinoma of the bladder. The other observation is the low mortality rate in 1943 comprised by the death of ~~all~~ patients. The causes of death in the hospital are as follows:

|  |   |
|--|---|
| Nephritis acute -----  | 1 |
| Malaria benign Tertian, with cerebral symptoms and hepatitis | 2 |
| Malaria Benign Tertian, with cerebral symptoms -----         | 2 |
| Wound, gunshot, neck -----                                   | 1 |
| Fracture, compound, skull ----                               | 1 |
| Injuries, multiple, extreme --                               | 1 |
| Septicemia, staphylococcus albus                             | 1 |
| Nephritis, acute -----                                       | 2 |

The admissions to the hospital varied from time to time and very frequently exceeded one hundred a day, necessitating duty parties nearly equally as large. They were transported by ambulances, jeeps, station

wagons, and it was not uncommon to see several large ten wheel trucks ridding themselves of masses of shaking, vomiting men with their sea bags, and dressed in the most nondescript fashion varying from dress greens to camouflage suits. Many of these men had broken down in manœuvres and were brought directly from field dispensaries. Hospital trains came and went at intervals as did various ships, both bringing men for further treatment and evacuating others to the United States. As the Marine Division became increasingly able to cope with a larger part of the 'sickness by opening other facilities, the admissions began to drop in the late spring only to have the largest volume in September. This was caused by the closing of other medical activities in preparation for the movement of all the troops from this area.

The unsteady and varying number of daily admissions taxed the facilities of the hospital plant to the utmost. The theater at a moment's notice would be cleared of benches and replaced by beds, wards with a single bunks were double-decked, the gymnasium was filled with patients, and the building erected for the American Red Cross was first occupied by patients as an emergency measure, and even before the paint had an opportunity to dry. The crew had to be moved into triple-decked bunks to make the steel buildings used for recreation and sleeping quarters, temporarily available for convalescent ambulatory patients.

140 The highest census for any one day at this activity was 1278 patients, which truthfully implies that flexibility was a major component of the organization of the hospital. Fortunately, the strain was met with greater ease in the later days of Base Hospital #4 than it was in the earlier days of Mobile Hospital #6, due to the extensive expansion that had been planned and executed. The new construction and facilities added to the compound and required by the greatly increased amount of work demanded of it are listed below in a chronological order starting as of March 17, 1943:

1. Red Cross building (2,700 sq.ft.) completed on March 20, 1943.
2. Transformer (to increase power supply to hospital from 100 kilowatt to 250 kilowatt capacity.) completed on March 23, 1943.
3. 2 - 500 gallon capacity gasoline tanks installed submerged in earth and connected in parallel lines to gas pump for vehicles, completed on March 31, 1943.
4. Boiler Room addition (2,150 sq.ft.) completed on April 9, 1943.
5. E.E.N.T. (420 sq.ft.) completed on April 12, 1943.
6. Storeroom (to handle excess bulk stores) (350 sq.ft.) completed on April 15, 1943.
7. 100 H.P. Boiler (to increase heating and hot water efficiency of hospital) completed on May 9, 1943.
8. Electric bake oven, 3 oven capacity B&H Christchurch 83 amp. for bake shop, completed on May 22, 1943.